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Programme element II.d (iv)

Matters left pending and other issues arising from the programme elements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests process

Issues that need further clarification: forest research

Report of the Secretary-General

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Summary

Consistent with the intent expressed in the final report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests, research is no longer being seen as a free-standing agenda item but is being "mainstreamed" throughout Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) deliberations, as well as recognized as an essential component in the formulation and implementation of national forest programmes (see E/CN.17/1997/12, para. 94).

The International Consultation on Research and Information Systems for Forestry (ICRIS) took place from 7 to 10 September 1998 at Gmunden, Austria (see E/CN.17/IFF/1999/17). ICRIS produced detailed conclusions and recommendations and proposed follow-up actions for consideration by IFF, such as considering the desirability of establishing a global forum or other appropriate body (for example, a consultative body) to bring together policy makers, funding agencies, forest research agencies, scientists and other stakeholders to provide guidance and direction to forestry science initiatives, and to strengthen policy-science linkages, particularly in the context of such global initiatives as IFF.

The present report suggests that IFF may wish to:

(a) Endorse the outcome of ICRIS and request the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests to follow up on the proposals made;

(b) Consider the success of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research in mobilizing resources and achieving coherence for international efforts to address a shared global agenda in the field of agriculture and food security and to examine the potential of extending that model to address forest research to ensure sustainable forest management;

(c) Endorse and promote the development of a global forest information service to enhance access to all forest-related information, ensuring that it is accessible to all stakeholders, including policy makers, forest managers, non-governmental organizations, community groups and the public at large.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1–6	3
II.	General overview of the status of discussions on forest research of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests	7–9	4
III.	Major issues	10	4
IV.	Preliminary proposals for action for consideration by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests	11–14	5

I. Introduction

1. At its first session, the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) defined programme element II.d (iv) as follows:

> "*Consider other issues arising from the programme elements of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) process needing further clarification ... inter alia* ... identification and definition of global and regional research priorities, taking into account national priorities (see E/CN.17/IFF/1997/4, para. 7, category II (d))"

2. IPF had requested that the Centre for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), in collaboration with relevant organizations and in consultation with a group of internationally recognized experts, as well as in conjunction with national, regional, intergovernmental and non-governmental bodies, develop as soon as possible mechanisms to:

(a) Guide the identification and definition as well as prioritization of global and eco-regional interdisciplinary research problems, taking into account national priorities and closely linked to practical and operational forest management issues;

(b) Promote consortia or networks to lead and organize global forest research and ensure that results are made available to all users;

(c) Build global capacity for forest research, and develop new and innovative means for disseminating information and technologies;

(d) Mobilize resources to accomplish the above objectives.

3. At its second session, IFF welcomed the initiative taken by the Governments of Indonesia and Austria to conduct the International Expert Consultation on Research and Information Systems for Forestry (ICRIS) at Gmunden, Austria, in September 1998, in collaboration with CIFOR, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the International Union of Forestry Research Organizations (IUFRO) and assisted by the IFF secretariat. During the discussions at the second session, participants noted a number of issues to be addressed in preparing for substantive discussion at the third session. They particularly encouraged the Forum to note at its third session:

(a) The need for improved coordination, which could be provided by networks for global forest-related research;

(b) Existing regional and global research networks and their potential in terms of data availability, capacity, objectives and possibilities for an effective linkage. These should be examined before new mechanisms and/or initiatives were established;

(c) The need for more institutionalized research on various matters relating to all types of forests, including unique types of forests, both in forested and low forest cover countries;

(d) The need for improved allocation of funds for priority forest research areas, including support for research activities in developing countries;

(e) The need for adequate use of scientific and traditional knowledge to support sustainable management of forests, especially regarding the processes that regulate forest structure, renewal, diversity and productivity;

(f) Targeted, policy relevant, practical research, which is especially essential to support practitioners at the field level;

(g) The results of ICRIS related to this programme element, which should further support the deliberations within IFF.

4. At its second session, IFF requested that the IFF secretariat, in preparation for its third session, examine and provide proposals on institutions that could act as a focal point for undertaking a systematic review of globally relevant ongoing research on forests, and could guide a prioritization process to improve the information exchange between policy makers, forest practitioners and scientists.

5. ICRIS took place from 7 to 10 September 1998 at Gmunden, Austria. It was attended by 80 participants from a wide range of countries and governmental, non-governmental and research organizations. A comprehensive report of ICRIS has been submitted to the Secretary-General by the Governments of Indonesia and Austria and is before the Forum at its third session (see E/CN.17/1999/17).

6. The present report, which was prepared by the IFF secretariat, is based on inputs received from CIFOR in collaboration with member organizations of the informal, high-level Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests.

II. General overview of the status of discussions on forest research of the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

7. The final report of IPF and the subsequent discussions of research at the first and second sessions of IFF reflect an emerging consensus of the existence of a shared global agenda on forest research. The issues being addressed at several of the inter-sessional initiatives under IFF (underlying causes, plantation forestry, protected areas etc.) have an important scientific underpinning. Consistent with the intent expressed in the final report of IPF (E/CN.17/1997/12), research is no longer being seen as a free-standing agenda item but is being mainstreamed throughout the IFF deliberations, as well as recognized as an essential component in the formulation and implementation of national forest programmes.

8. Research has also emerged as a major issue of international concern under the other intergovernmental processes and conventions with forest-related components. It should be noted in particular that:

(a) The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change has established a scientific task force to examine issues related to forests and climate change, especially the role of forests in climate change mitigation measures;

(b) The Convention on Biological Diversity has agreed on a set of research priorities to underpin the conservation of forest biological diversity;

(c) The Council of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has adopted guidelines for GEF support to research on biological diversity and climate change issues;

(d) A recent independent review of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has concluded that development assistance in support of research has made greater contributions to improving the welfare of poor people and conserving the environment than other forms of development assistance. The report concluded that there is a major need for increased international assistance to support research on integrated natural resource management, with special emphasis on forests and agroforestry. The recommendations are under review by CGIAR, and decisions are expected to be made in May 1999;

(e) A major review of the policies of the World Bank that have an impact on forests is making extensive use of research, much of it in the areas recognized as priority issues in the work of IPF and IFF;

(f) The development of criteria and indicators of sustainable forest management, undertaken by a number of international processes (Montreal, Helsinki, Tarapoto, International Tropical Timber Organization, African Timber Organization, Near East, Dry Zone Africa, Central America), is founded on scientifically based and internationally accepted concepts and principles.

9. The above considerations indicate that all international, regional and national agendas for forests reiterate the need for science-based approaches to achieve management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests.

III. Major issues

10. As result of the Austria-Indonesia initiative, ICRIS produced detailed conclusions and recommendations (see E/CN.17/1999/17). ICRIS participants, notably IUFRO, also proposed follow-up actions for consideration by IFF, including considering the desirability of establishing a global forum or other appropriate body (for example a consultative body) to bring together policy makers, funding agencies, forest research agencies, scientists and other stakeholders to provide guidance and direction to forestry science initiatives and to strengthen policy-science linkages, particularly in the context of such global initiatives as IFF. The possible functions of such a body might include:

(a) Identifying possible science elements in international instruments on forests;

(b) Synthesizing currently available knowledge to strengthen policy decisions;

(c) Encouraging and supporting research capacity development at the national, regional and global levels in accordance with relevant policies (national, regional or global) relating to forestry and allied sectors;

(d) Strengthening linkages with allied international bodies to avoid duplication of efforts and strengthen the synergy of global efforts;

(e) Mobilizing and channelling resources to strengthen research at all levels, in particular to address critical issues.

IV. Preliminary proposals for action for consideration by the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests

11. IFF may wish to endorse the outcome of ICRIS and request the Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests to follow up on the above proposals. The Task Force, as currently composed, includes the major international bodies with mandates dealing with research on forest systems, notably FAO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), CIFOR and the World Bank. In particular, IFF may wish to encourage the World Bank to give special attention to needs and opportunities for forest research in the context of its ongoing forest policy review.

12. IFF may wish to consider the success of CGIAR in mobilizing resources and achieving coherence for international efforts to address a shared global agenda in the field of agriculture and food security and to examine the potential of extending that model to address forest research to ensure sustainable forest management and to maintain adequate cover of all types of forest and other wooded lands to meet a variety of current and future human needs. In particular, IFF may wish to note that CGIAR co-sponsors include FAO, UNEP, the World Bank and UNDP, which are all also members of the Task Force.

13. IFF may wish to consider endorsing and promoting the development of a global forest information service to enhance access to all forest-related information, ensuring that it is accessible to all stakeholders, including policy makers, forest managers, non-governmental organizations, community groups and the public at large. Individual countries may wish to allocate resources to such a service, both through international agencies (FAO, IUFRO and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre) as well as through the national research and information organizations that would participate in the service.

14. IFF may wish to especially note the growing evidence that development assistance applied to building national research capacity has provided more sustainable long-term benefits to recipient countries than other forms of development assistance. It is more useful to provide countries with the capacity to solve their own problems than to use aid budgets to deliver ready-made solutions to those problems through advisory missions and planning or technical assistance projects. Accordingly, IFF may wish to endorse the ICRIS recommendation, and to strongly encourage Governments to strengthen regional and global efforts focused on national research capacity-building and strengthen research networks to "fast-track" capacity development and provide windows of opportunity for inter-country/inter-institutional collaboration in forest science.